

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS  
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LEBANON/U.S.  
EMBASSY ATTACK

BROKAW: Now with this new controversy over who was at fault in the Beirut bombing, there may be a whole new issue in the campaign, and in his commentary tonight, John Chancellor suggests that the intelligence failure in Beirut may not have been in the past. John.

CHANCELLOR: The president got himself in hot water yesterday when he said that one of the reasons for the latest Beirut bombing is, in his words, 'the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years.' One of his aides said yesterday that Mr. Reagan was talking about the Carter administration, but today the White House said he was talking about a 10-year period of a decline in the 1970s, and that includes, says the White House, 'a weakening in traditional means of espionage during the Carter administration.' That would be the Halloween massacre as it has come to be known. In 1976, the Congress issued devastating reports on misdeeds in the CIA's clandestine services, and in 1977 the Carter administration purged the dirty tricks department of the CIA, which cut overall CIA strength by perhaps 5 percent. After that, the Carter administration began building up the CIA. The Halloween massacre upset a lot of old-line CIA-types, but it in no way produced anything like the near destruction of intelligence gathering. And the people purged were, in the main, old OSS, Ivy League, Cold War operatives who knew little or nothing about the Middle East. The sad fact is that many of the CIA's best Middle East experts died 17 months ago when the embassy in Beirut was blown up during the Reagan administration. One key point: when your intelligence is poor and you don't know what your enemy might do, you maximize your defenses against anything that might happen. If intelligence in Lebanon is as bad as the president says, American defenses against an attack should have been at full strength. They weren't. Maybe that's where the blame lies and not somewhere back in the 1970s.